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NORTH AMERICA

A Pre-Lenape Site in New Jersey. E. W. HAWKES and RALPH LINTON (Anthropological Publications, University Museum, University of Pennsylvania, Vol. VI, No. 3, Philadelphia, 1916, pp. 43–77, Plates XVI–XXIV.)

Catchword errors have at least the virtue of rendering class characteristics conspicuous. Such an error in the work under review serves then to point out that the "argillite culture" at Trenton cannot be used as a class caption to designate a dumping-ground for heterogeneous data.

The essential characteristics of the "argillite culture" of Abbott and Volk can be determined by an analysis of Volk's published data[1] to be the following. The culture as a whole is manifestly distinct from that of the Lenape, since artifact forms are confined to pitless hammerstones and to a limited number of types of arrow points and larger chipped blades. These objects are not exclusively of argillite, and all are more or less weathered. In addition fire-fractured stones, some charcoal (?), and fragments of bone were found. Tabulating Volk's extensive series of measurements of individual objects of the "argillite culture" found in the yellow soil, the startlingly unique character of the finds is brought out. Throughout the area of his digging, some three miles long, the objects lay in a single plane of maximum deposition and at every point in that plane showed a vertical distribution identical with that of a normally variable series; this in spite of the fact that Volk refers to "fire places" and "workshops" in the yellow soil.[2] It is true that nowhere is Volk explicit as to the significant characteristics of his "argillite culture," but his data have been published in great detail.

Subsequent excavations in the yellow soil by the American Museum of Natural History[3] corroborated these characteristics and demonstrated further that the distribution of pebbles in this stratum—clearly of non-human deposition—was identical with that of the artifacts. This seems a fair indication that the depositing agent at Trenton was geological and not human.

In their excavations at a site on Rancocas Creek, six miles from the Delaware River and fifteen south of Trenton, Messrs. Hawkes and Linton found two or three distinct cultures corresponding to two geological strata. In the surface soil were remains of the Lenape, while at the bottom of a stratum of yellow soil below this argillite implements were found lying on white glacial sand. In an intermediate position in the yellow soil were "a few scattered points of argillite exhibiting better workmanship and less signs of decay" and sherds of very crude pottery. In the lowest stratum fire pits had been dug down into the white glacial sand and

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[1] Ernest Volk, "The Archaeology of the Delaware Valley," *Papers Peabody Museum American Archeology and Ethnology*, Cambridge, August 1911, vol. V.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 85, 87, 88, 89, and 98.

[3] *American Anthropologist*, vol. 18, no. 2, April–June, 1916, pp. 181–197.

> while the white sand was discolored for some distance down, the yellow layer above was unmarked, proving conclusively that they had no connection with the upper layer.

Lying on the white sand and arranged in parallel rows about a large central fire pit were groups of objects—banner stones, large blades and concretions. These objects were "characterized by crude workmanship and an exclusive use of argillite," as well as extensive decay of the surface. Six types of points were recognized here, lances, hand daggers (?), knives, diamond-shaped points, broad-faced barbed points, and fish spears (?); with these were many banner stones and other objects, some problematical.

The artifacts from an intermediate position in the yellow soil were "characterized also by the use of argillite, but with improved workmanship and the beginnings of pottery." All of the types found in the lowest level, except the lance and broad-faced barbed point, and in addition one drill, were found in this intermediate level. With these were several potsherds of unique composition.

So much for the cultural characteristics, According to Prof. Amos P. Brown, who determined the geological characteristics of the site,

> there are indications that the yellow sand is a wind-borne deposit laid down upon the layer of white glacial sand, and though its age is not clearly defined, it must be of considerable antiquity.

Why then has the material from the lowest and the intermediate layers been classed with the "argillite culture" of Trenton? It would appear that the authors have established this identity on the basis of the following characteristics supposed to be common to both: the exclusive use of argillite in each case, the extensive decay of the surface of the artifacts, the proximity of the sites, and the occurrence of objects in both cases in a stratum of yellow soil. The foregoing brief résumés should at once make it clear that we have to do here with a gross error in identification. Even a casual inspection of Volk's data, *not* his general statements, would show that argillite was not exclusively used at Trenton. The decay to which the surface of artifacts at both Rancocas Creek and Trenton has been subjected is hardly to be considered presumptive evidence in favor of their identity. The proximity of the sites may be considered as additional evidence only if the identity of the cultures is established on other non-topographic grounds, but certainly it is of little significance when the disparity of the material is obvious. Finally, the off-hand assumed equivalence of the yellow soil strata in the two sites is inadmissible as evidence of the identity of the cultures. We are told in one case that "there are indications that the yellow sand is a wind-borne deposit laid down upon the layer of white glacial sand," while the geological antecedents of the Trenton deposit have never been determined! Further, the difference in the way in which the equated cultures occur in these strata is entirely ignored. In one case, the objects were apparently deposited by human agency on a temporary surface which was subsequently covered by yellow soil, while in the other the artifacts occur in a curious accidental fashion, and moreover appear to be but part of a larger general series comprised of artifacts and pebbles together.

But above all the obvious cultural dissimilarity of the two groups is ignored, or rather not considered of sufficient weight to militate against the identification of the cultures. Yet both of the Rancocas Creek culture horizons are richer in traits than is the Trenton "argillite culture:" in them we find the banner stone, the drill, pottery and possibly several forms of chipped tools none of which are represented in the Trenton culture. Furthermore we must remember that the lower Rancocas horizon is probably a ceremonial site, and as such, we suspect, does not represent the totality of that culture. As against the meagerness of the Trenton culture the disparity of these cultures is glaringly apparent. Nor does the citation of other sites where argillite alone occurs increase the probability of their identity, for just such heterogeneous material is avowedly included there.

If then the finds of Messrs. Hawkes and Linton are not to be considered as a local example of the Trenton "argillite culture," nor necessarily as a direct outgrowth from it, what is their significance? The authors have contributed a unique and important find, a new culture in New Jersey. Their work includes a detailed description of the objects comprising that culture (or cultures?), although a more detailed description of the ceremonial site itself would have been of value. Inasmuch as Dr. Abbott and others have reported occurrences of similar material along Rancocas Creek, we may anticipate the development of an extensive area in which this culture occurs.

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